

Message Text

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SUBJECT: CORRUPTION CHARGE CONTINUES TO PLAGUE TARKA

REF: LAGOS 6780

SUMMARY: REACTIONS TO ALLEGATIONS OF CORRUPTION AGAINST COMMISSIONER TARKA CONTINUE TO DOMINATE MOST NIGERIAN NEWSPAPERS. DEMANDS FOR FMG ACTION ORIGINATE PRIMARILY FROM YORUBA-DOMINANT AREAS, WITH NORTHERN SPOKESMAN ASSUMING MORE BALANCED APPROACH. IBO ELEMENTS AND EASTERN AREA PRESS HAVE BEEN NOTICEABLY SILENT. OUR IMPRESSION IS THAT FMG MAY WELL ACT SOON TO SUSPEND TARKA WHILE IT CONDUCTS INVESTIGATION OF CORRUPTION CHARGES. END SUMMARY

1. TARKA AFFAIR REMAINS NATION'S NUMBER ONE TOPIC OF DISCUSSION, WITH GROWING NUMBER OF PEOPLE MAKING PUBLIC STATEMENTS RANGING FROM CALL FOR FMG TO INVESTIGATE ALL COMMISSIONERS TO CALL FOR "AGITATORS" TO STOP HARASSING FMG AND LEAVE MATTER IN HANDS OF GENERAL GOWON. MOST PUBLICIZED OPINION, WHICH EMANATES PRIMARILY FROM YORUBA-DOMINATED NEWSPAPERS, IS THAT FMG SHOULD SUSPEND TARKA AND UNDERTAKE A FULL PROBE OF CORRUPTION ALLEGATIONS. SEVERAL YORUBA EDITORIALS HAVE TAKEN LINE THAT FMG ACTED QUICKLY IN SUSPENDING TWO

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YORUBA BRIGADIERS WHEN THEIR NAMES WERE LINKED IN A LONDON

COURT HEARING ON AN INDIAN HEMP SMUGGLING CASE (LAGOS 2258), BUT IN TARKA CASE, WHERE EVIDENCE IS LOCALLY AVAILABLE AND MUCH MORE SUBSTANTIAL, FMG HAS TAKEN NO ACTION. EDITORIALS EXCORIATE APPARENT DOUBLE STANDARD OPERATING TO ADVANTAGE OF NON-YORUBAS.

2. THERE HAS BEEN NO MENTION OF THIS SUBJECT IN ANY NEWSPAPERS FROM EASTERN STATES. MILITARY GOVERNOR OF SOUTH-EASTERN STATE HAS TAKEN SAME LINE AS HIS LAGOS COUNTERPART, THAT MATTER SHOULD BE LEFT TO GENERAL GOWON, BUT OTHER THAN THIS THERE HAS BEEN NO PUBLIC STATEMENT FROM EASTERN AREA OFFICIALS. ONE IBO CIVIL SERVANT IN LAGOS STATED PRIVATELY THAT IBOS HAVE NO INTENTION OF GETTING INVOLVED IN WHAT THEY SEE AS YORUBA/HAUSA FIGHT. IBOS, HE ADDED, ARE WILLING TO WATCH YORUBAS TAUGHT A LESSON IN POLITICS. HE ALSO BELIEVES ENTIRE ISSUE WILL FADE FROM PUBLIC SIGHT, WITH NO ACTION AGAINST TARKA, DESPITE YORUBA NOISE-MAKING EFFORTS.

3. TARKA HAS REMAINED RELATIVELY SILENT ON ISSUE OTHER THAN STATEMENT THAT HE WOULD NOT RESIGN. HE AGAIN STATED HIS BELIEF THAT THERE WERE SINISTER MOTIVES BEHIND ALLEGATIONS CONCERNING HIS CONDUCT IN OFFICE, ADDING THAT HIS RESIGNATION WOULD SET BAD PRECEDENT FOR OTHERS ACCUSED IN FUTURE OF WRONG-DOING. DAILY TIMES QUITTED TARKA, ON JULY 27, AS SAYING HIS RESIGNATION WOULD TOUCH OFF A CHAIN REACTION OF VARIOUS EVENTS, THE END OF WHICH NOBODY COULD FORESEE. AUGUST 1 ISSUE OF DAILY TIMES REPORTS TARKA HAS FILED LIBEL CASE FOR ONE MILLION NAIRA AGAINST THIS NEWSPAPER.

4. SOME POLITICAL OBSERVERS CONTEND THAT TOP LEVEL FMG OFFICIALS SUPPORT, AND PERHAPS INITIATED, CAMPAIGN AGAINST TARKA. ACCORDING TO THIS LINE OF THINKING, HIGHEST LEVEL OF FMG HAVING MADE DECISION TO SUPPORT FEDERAL COMMISSIONER FOR HEALTH ALHAJI AMINU KANO AS NATION'S NEXT PRIME MINISTER NOW SEEKS TO DISCREDIT TARKA AND DIMINISH HIS POLITICAL POTENTIAL, THEREBY REDUCING OR DESTROYING HIS CHANCES OF HAVING A MAJOR VOICE IN FORMATION OF ANY FUTURE CIVILIAN GOVERNMENT. SUPPORTING THIS SUGGESTION IS FACT THAT NORTHERN NEWSPAPERS AND LEADERS, WHILE NOT JOINING IN ATTACK ON TARKA, HAVE NOT GONE OUT OF THEIR WAY TO SUPPORT HIM EITHER.

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5. COMMENT: CORRUPTION AS AN ISSUE HAS BEEN MUCH IN THE PUBLIC EYE IN RECENT MONTHS WITH SUSPENSION OF BRIGADIERS ADEKUNLE AND SOTOMI AND HAS BEEN ONE POINT IN NINE POINT PROGRAM ON WHICH FMG HAS GIVEN IMPRESSION OF SOME ACTIVITY. FAILURE TO MOVE IN TARKA CASE WOULD NOT ONLY SOUR POSITIVE IMPRESSION FROM BRIGADIERS' SUSPENSION BUT WOULD PROVIDE PUBLIC DOCUMENTATION OF DOUBLE STANDARD INCREASINGLY ALLUDED TO IN PRESS. AS PRESSURE

CONTINUES, IT IS DIFFICULT TO SEE HOW FMG CAN AVOID TAKING SOME KIND OF ACTION ON TARKA SUCH AS SUSPENDING HIM FROM HIS POSITION WHILE AN INVESTIGATION IS CONDUCTED.

6. ON THE OTHER HAND, TARKA IS A TIV, WELL-CONNECTED IN THE NORTH, REPORTEDLY HAS SOME FAMILY RELATIONSHIP WITH GOWON. MOREOVER, HIS REMARK (PARA 3 ABOVE) ABOUT TOUCHING OFF A CHAIN REACTION WITH INCALCULABLE RESULTS APPEARS AN ILL-DISGUISED THREAT TO BRING OTHER TOP OFFICIALS DOWN WITH HIM IF HE IS TAKEN TO COURT. WE SUSPECT THAT IF TARKA IS SUSPENDED, THE "INVESTIGATION" WILL TEND STRETCH OUT WITHOUT RESULT UNTIL MEMORY FADES, AS APPEARS TO BE THE COURSE BEING FOLLOWED IN CASE OF THE BRIGADIERS.
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